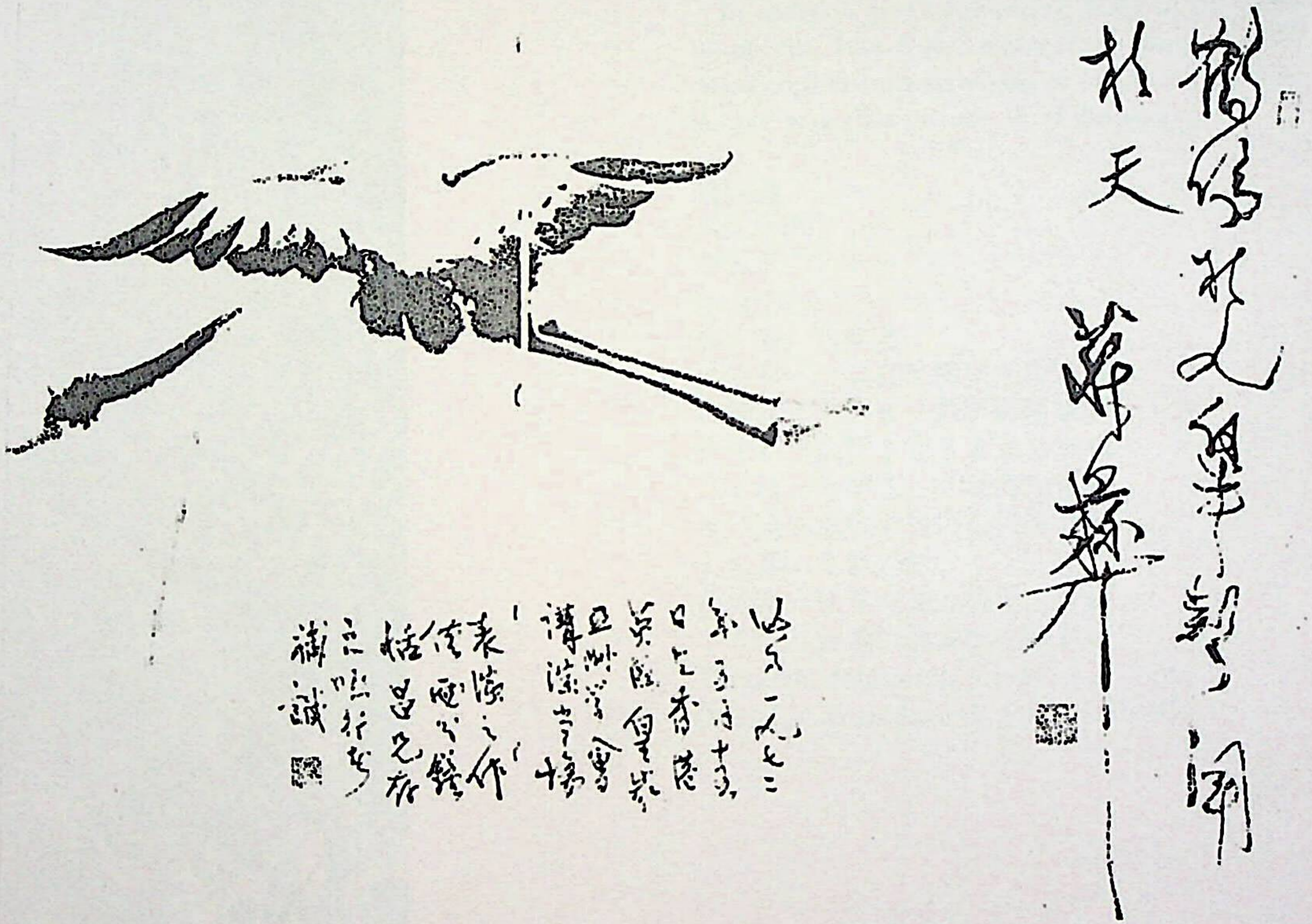
The Eight Immortals/by T.C.Lai



The Soaring Crane by Chiang Yee
Incription on the right: "The cranes cry in the marshes and the sound is heard in Heaven." (from the Book of Odes)

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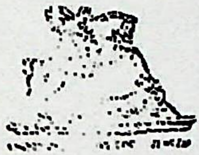
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Contents





Author's Note

In order to give a composite image of the Eight Immortals, I have used many illustrations that are either aesthetically satisfying or of historical value. Source materials include the following:

列仙傳
呂祖全書
四遊記
嶺南詩存
浦江清—八仙考
岳伯川—呂洞賓度鐵拐李岳雜劇
馬致遠—呂洞賓三醉岳陽樓雜劇
賈仲名—鐵拐李度金童玉女雜劇
谷子敬—呂洞賓三度城南柳雜劇
馬致遠—邯鄲道省悟黃粱夢雜劇
吳元泰—八仙過海
范子安—陳季卿誤上竹葉舟雜劇
爭玉板八仙過滄海雜劇（闕名）
The Eight Immortals, by Percival Yetts
(Royal Asiatic Society Journal 1916)

T.C.L.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Professor Liu Ts'un-Yan for the FOREWORD.

Grateful thanks are due to:

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Foreword

The legend of the Eight Immortals is perhaps one of the best known tales of Taoist literature not only among the Asians, but also the Westerners who have some idea of Chinese civilization and who seek eagerly, though often in vain, for some kind of solace within, or liberation from, the tenacious and indestructible human bondage. Vulgar, anonymous, little pamphlets in English, representing a curious mixture of the hear-says from the Chinese story-books with the newly created stories, are found on the book stalls in the Chinatowns of San Francisco, Boston and New York, and, like the take-away hot Chinese meals, are in continuous demand. Intelligent works on this topic are not available, and for many years I have been longing for an interesting pocket-book for Western readers penned by a literary hand with proficient knowledge of popular Chinese literature. I was delighted, therefore, when I was offered a chance of seeing the galley proofs of Mr. Lai's book during my last visit to Hong Kong, for I knew that it was exactly what the average reader sought: a concise work of fascinating narrations in good English, a combination of good literary taste with a thorough background knowledge, without however the unnecessary pedantry.

Historically speaking, Taoism, as seen by its earliest founders, was more a product of a sort of philosopy of life than of religious beliefs. During the second century, when the religious Taoism

was beginning to gain the upper hand over its metaphisical predecessor, there were some devout Taoists whose interest in the mundane world was so strong that they wished to take only half a dose of the elixir of immortality so that they would not become celestial immortals but would remain on this earth and enjoy the worldly pleasures. Through the gentle process of amalgamation of the Three Teachings – Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism – which began possibly from the sixth century, some of the Confucianist pragmatism and the Zen Buddhist teaching of sudden enlightenment penetrated into the religious thought of popular Taoism, so that in Taoist works of later times we find stories depicting the hardships constantly endured by the rural people or the distress and disillusion experienced by an unsuccessful candidate at the state examinations as well as a *gatha* or a passage of *goroku* (*yü-lu*). However, the practice of alchemy and self-cultivation in terms of physical exercises, the study of the internal circulation of the *ch'i* and sexual transcendance are still perhaps the most significant aspects of the indigenous belief. Reflecting all these phenomena the tales of the Eight Immortals, who were said to have trodden the rough waves of the Eastern Sea in a group, represent a special genre of literature which reached its apogee as late as the fourteenth century, when China was still under the severe rule of the Mongols.

In the first part of his book Mr. Lai gives us a brief but clear and most interesting account of

each of these Immortals based on a considerable amount of first-hand source material. The second part of his book is in fact an admirable translation of a well-known Mongol-Yüan play about the deification of a certain Iron-crutch Li Yüeh who was one of the Eight Immortals. In the last part of the book Mr. Lai subjects the life of another Immortal Lü Tung-pin, a true historical personage, to a more lengthy treatment. He also appends his writing with a translation of some thirty poems known or alleged to have been composed by Lü himself. As Mr. Lai is not writing for us a treatise on the authenticity of these poems, we certainly can admire his lucid English and the wisdom of the lyrics without a study of their apocryphal nature. I do hope that the following lines from one of these poems will touch deeply the mind of the readers as they did move mine when I first glanced at them:

I have pine-breeze for sale.
Have you bought some yet?
For thirty thousand taels of gold,
I shall give you one gourdful.

It might be for exactly the same reason, I think, that Mr. Lai's delightful book is neither bulky nor obtrusive.

Liu Ts'un-yan

Canberra, May, 1972.



The Eight Immortals greeting Lao Tzu



PART ONE

The Eight Immortals





The Eight Immortals greeting Lao Tzu

藏畫神仙人不知



The Eight Immortals

The Chinese concept of *Hsien* or Immortal denotes a being which is at once ethereal and worldly. The character *hsien* is composed of two pictographic elements, "man" and "mountain", symbolising one who has retired from the world in order to live a hermit's life in the mountains. Chuang Tzu has described *hsien* as a spiritual being dwelling on a mountain, whose flesh was smooth as ice and skin as white as snow; that he was gentle as a young girl and required no food to sustain life, but inhaled the wind and drank the dew.

An immortal sometimes assumes human shape and indulges in human pleasures, but nevertheless is possessed of supernatural powers. He resides in the upper spheres, but sometimes descends to earth to convert and "immortalize" deserving



mortals. Like human beings, he may be chastised for misconduct and banished to live on earth for a period of time and then reinstated in heaven.

Immortality is said to be attainable by taking the Elixir of Life, a drug, the secret formula for which is forever eluding ordinary intelligence, although some of the ingredients were revealed to be cinnabar, or red sulphide of mercury, realgar, copper carbonate, mica, sal ammonia, nitre and ochre. Immortality is also attainable by cultivating the mind, with Tao as the model: quietude, passivity, gentleness, self-effacement being the main characteristics to be aimed at.

For one reason or another, many famous figures in Chinese history were included in the ranks of immortals. They might be philosophers, statesmen,



The Eight Immortals crossing a sea (mural, Yung Lo Shrine)

physicians, magicians, and poets. Li Po, the poet, for instance, was considered one and Chang Liang the Han Dynasty statesman was another, and the list can go on and on. Because of the great numbers, "*hsiens*" were classified and described as celestial, terrestrial or divine. Celestial *hsiens* were those who have ascended on high and make their abode in heaven; terrestrial *hsiens* remain on earth for an indefinite period without growing any older; divine *hsiens* or demi-gods dwell on the Isles of the Blest.

The Eight Immortals are the best known figures in Chinese mythology. They lived in different centuries. How and when they got together was never described. The number "eight" has some

peculiar significance, a kind of "perfect" number, as exemplified by the Eight Trigrams, the Eight Regions, the Eight Directions, and so on. In this case, "eight" signifies certain conditions of life, namely: youth, age, poverty, wealth, aristocracy, plebianism, masculinity and femininity. It was not until the Yüan Dynasty (1260-1368) that the term was first applied to the specific group that we know today which consists of Chung-li Ch'üan, Chang Kuo Lao, Lü Tung Pin, Ts'ao Kuo Chiu, Li T'ieh Kuai, Han Hsiang-tzu, Lan Ts'ai-ho and Ho Hsien-ku. The "Eight Immortals" theme was often used by the Yüan Dynasty dramatists, on which many short plays were written for birthday presentation. Hence its traditional popularity, and we often find these Immortals on paintings, porcelainware, and so on.



The Eight Immortals on porclain



閑日尋真之自歸

Lan Ts'ai-ho

In the *T'ai Ping Kuang Chi*, a biographical encyclopaedia compiled in the Sung Dynasty, there is a description of Lan Ts'ai-ho as follows: "Nobody knows who Lan Ts'ai-ho was. He was in the habit of putting on ragged clothing, one foot bared and the other wearing a boot. He wore a belt, consisting of six pieces of wood three inches wide, round his waist and carried a basket full of flowers. In summer he wore a quilted garment, but in winter he wore a thin gown. He liked to lie on the snow, and from his body issued a steam-like vapour. He begged in the city streets clapping a pair of castanets three feet long. He was habitually drunk, singing while he walked, followed by the young and old. A humorist, he was skilful in the art of repartee and he could make people laugh till they rolled on the ground.



Chang Kuo-lao and Lan Ts'ai-ho by Jen Po-nin

His favourite song runs like this:

Lan Ts'ai-ho –
Let's beat time
With our feet
And sing:
How long is the world going to last?
Beauty and youth are like trees in Spring.
The years fly past like a movement of the shuttles.
The ancients have gone like running water never to return,
But the men of today are pressing on in increasing numbers.
In the morning I ride up in the sky;
In the evening I behold all the mulberry groves turn into a sea.
Our real hope is up in the clouds;
There you'll find tall palaces of silver and gold.

His songs were many, not always intelligible but always full of ideas of immortality. He would string the coins he received with a long cord which he trailed behind him as he walked. He would give some of them to the poor or spend them in the tavern. He travelled all over the country and he kept himself always young. On one occasion, he was drinking in a tavern when he heard the sound of flute and reed-organ. He suddenly took off from the ground, mounted a crane and disappeared into the clouds, meanwhile throwing down his clothing, a boot, his girdle and castanets."



Li T'ieh-Kuai and Ho Hsien-ku by Jen Po-nin



心空道亦空
風靜林還靜

Ho Hsien-ku

Ho Hsien-ku, according to legend, was a native of Tsêng Ch'êng, in the province of Kwangtung and lived in the T'ang Dynasty. At birth she had six long hairs on the crown of her head. When she was fourteen, she dreamt a spirit taught her to take a powder called yün-mu (possibly powdered mica) which would give her immortality and feather-light gait. She vowed to remain a virgin. Up hill and down dale, she used to flit just like a creature with wings. Everyday at dawn she sallied forth, to return at dusk bringing back mountain fruits she had gathered for her mother.

Another account goes like this:

"When Ho Hsien-ku was thirteen, she lost her way on a tea-picking trip on a hill. She met a priest to whom she paid great respect. The priest

gave her a peach, which she ate. Since then she felt no hunger." The priest turned out to be Lü Tung Pin.

Ho Hsien-ku's special emblem is a bamboo ladle, for which the following explanation is given: she had a stepmother who treated her cruelly, keeping her toiling all day. In spite of this, she behaved with great filial patience and Lü Tung Pin was moved to rescue her from her misery. He found her busy in the kitchen and as he helped her to ascend, she was still carrying the ladle.

Several of her poems were collected in an anthology entitled *Poems Preserved South of the Mountains*, one of which reads:

My immortal sister chides me for dallying in
  dust and noise,
Withal so distant from the great Immortals'
  abode.
To the waters' brink now I go and play with
  Moon,
Ride the yellow crane and hear the bell-like
  flute.

This poem was found between a screen and an inkstand on the night on which she was to have been wedded, but she left home without leaving word as to her destination. On the path near a well lay a pair of her slippers.



誰解長生似我哉

Lü Tung Pin

Lü Yen, styled Tung Pin, lived in the T'ang Dynasty and was generally believed to have been immortalized by Chung-li Ch'üan. Lü was a Chu-Jen scholar but he failed several times to win the title of Chin-Shih. There are many legends extant regarding him. The most popular one seems to be contained in one of the playlets in Yüan Dynasty Drama in which he was described as having dreamt the proverbial "Yellow-millet dream", a story which was already in circulation during the T'ang Dynasty.

In the play, Lü was depicted as a scholar travelling to the capital to sit for the Court Examination. He stopped one evening in a road-side inn where, while he was waiting for the yellow-millet to be cooked, he fell asleep. He



Ts'ao Kuo-chiu and Lu Tung Pin by Jen Po-nin

dreamed that he suffered defeat in the hands of brigands, that his wife was unfaithful to him, and that he went through many distressing circumstances until he finally met Chung-li Ch'üan who made him see the Truth. Upon his awakening from the dream, eighteen years had already passed.

Lü Tung Pin was recorded to have said in Lü Tsü Chih:

— "I always laugh when people say that I have a sword which I use for killing. How can that be? An Immortal is like Buddha, who is merciful. It is ridiculous to believe that an Immortal kills. It is true I possess a sword but it is used for different purposes: for extirpating avarice, passion and vexation. I hold that those who merely understand my Truth are inferior to those who practise it. Those who practise it according to my instructions do not really need to see me in order to know the Way. Otherwise it is of no avail even if they see me everyday."

Lü is widely worshipped as a patron saint of literature. His emblem is the magic two-edged sword which conferred the gift of invisibility, and enabled him to overcome evil spirits.





丹田有寶休尋道
對境無心莫問禪

Chung-li Chuan

Chung-li Ch'üan is generally believed to have lived in the Han Dynasty. That is why he is sometimes known as Han Chung-li. He is described as being corpulent, tall with beard reaching down to his navel, and often bald-headed. He was well-versed in literary pursuits and was particularly good at calligraphy. His distinctive emblem is a fan. He is distinguished by two coils of hair, one on either side of his head.

One account about Chung-li Ch'üan says that when reaching a man's stature, he was given command of an expedition sent by the Han Emperor against the Tibetans. But, having suffered defeat, he became a fugitive. It is when he was in hiding in the wide and mountainous country that his conversion took place.

The story of his conversion goes like this:

Lost in a dense forest, he came upon a foreign priest with unkempt hair and garments made of straw, who led him to the house of the venerable Master Tung-hua, saying that he could get a lodging there. Chung-li Ch'üan was greatly impressed by the old man and earnestly begged for the secrets of immortality. Master Tung-hua thereupon imparted to him not only an infallable magic process for attaining longevity, but also the method to produce the "Philosopher's Stone". As Chung-li Chüan was about to depart, having said farewell to the old man, he turned round for a last look at the village, but it had mysteriously vanished.

He is generally recognised by his distinctive emblem, a fan, which may be made of feather or one roughly quadrangular with rounded corners and concave edges, made from the leaf of a fan-palm.



閒來飛過洞庭秋
鐵笛一聲天涯掃

Han Hsiang-tzu

Han Hsiang-tzu was generally reputed to be the grand-nephew of the great literary figure Han Yü of the T'ang Dynasty. A completely unbridled youth, he was once rebuked by his grand-uncle and advised to do some serious studies. The reply was: "What you study is not what I want to study." To make his meaning clear, he composed the following poem:

"In a cave mid mists and torrents by green-
clad peaks I live;
I sip the dew at midnight that stars the earth
like gems;
I make my food the rosy clouds that flush
the coming dawn.
I play the Green Jade Melody upon a seven-
stringed lute,



The Drunken Immortals by Wang Chun

And melt in fiery alembics fine-powdered
pearls and white;
Within my Precious Cauldron the Golden
Tiger dwells;
I grow the Magic Fungus to feed the Snow-
white Crows,
With Nature's creative powers my bottle-
gourd is stored,
I slay the evil demons with my magic three-
foot blade;
Wine fills the empty goblet when I speak the
wizard word,
And flowers spring up and bloom in the
twinkling of an eye;
Show me the man who doth these things in
the way that I have told,
And I will gladly talk with him of the *hsien*
who ne'er grow old."

(Translation by Percival Yetts)

When Han Yü asked what special ability he had, Han Hsiang-tzu said he had some of the creative powers of nature and he demonstrated it by having some peonies grown in a pot, the colour of which was quite different from any ever seen. What was more strange was that on the petals of the flowers was written a couplet which reads:

Clouds envelop the Ch'in Mountains and I
cannot find my way,
Snow descends on the Lan Pass and the
horse will not proceed.

Han Yü could make nothing of the lines but Hsiang-tzu insisted that there is a hidden meaning in them which would soon be revealed.

Meanwhile, Han Yü had incurred the displeasure of the then Emperor and was banished to Ch'ao Chou in the province of Kwangtung. On his way, snow fell heavily and he could not proceed. Out of the blue came Hsiang-tzu, who said: "Do you remember the couplet on the flowers? This is the event it describes." Upon enquiry, the spot where they were stranded was called Lan Pass.

Han Yü was moved to write a poem which contains the oracular couplet:

> In the morning I submitted a memorial to the Throne,
> In the evening I, being banished, took to the road.
> I wanted my Emperor to make reforms
> Risking my position and my life thereby.
> Clouds envelop the Ch'in Mountains and I cannot find my way,
> Snow descends on Lan Pass and the horse will not proceed.
> I know, coming such a long way, you must know something –
> Perhaps to collect my bones on the river's bank?

Han Hsiang-tzu gave his grand-uncle this valedictory poem:

> The world is inebriate with gain and fame
> But I am sober seeking the true way.
> By and by I shall ascend to the spheres
> Cleaving open the blue autumn sky.



杖頭春色一壺酒
爐內丹砂萬點金

Li T'ieh Kuai

Perhaps the most picturesque personality among the Immortals is Li T'ieh Kuai or Iron-Crutch Li, whose conversion is described in the short play which constitutes Section Two in this volume. One of the versions of the legend about him goes as follows:

When Li Hsüan was immortalized, his spirit on one occasion had to leave his body to go on a trip and he had instructed his disciple to watch over his corporeal self, saying that he would be back within seven days and on the understanding that if he did not come back by then, the disciple might burn the corpse. However, it so happened that on the sixth day the disciple's mother was taken seriously ill and he was persuaded to go home and see her. So he had a pretty difficult



Li T'ieh-Kuai by Ch'i Pai Shih

choice to make between forsaking his mother or forsaking his Master. And like a filial son, he burned the corpse and went home. So, when Li returned and not finding his own corpse, he was compelled to use the corpse of a crippled beggar.

Besides the crutch, Li's recognised emblem is the bottle-gourd or calabash.



Li T'ieh-kuai by Ch'i Pai Shih



Chung-li Chuan and Lu Tung Pin (Mural, Yung Lo Shrine)



浮名浮世兩何堪
迴首歸山味轉甘

Chang Kuo Lao

Of the Eight Immortals, the one that is most solidly based on history is perhaps Chang Kuo Lao, whose biography can be found in the Chiu T'ang Shu and the Hsin T'ang Shu. The legendary part about his life includes these: that he rode a white mule which could go thousands of miles a day and which could be folded up like a piece of paper and put in his cap-box. When Chang wanted to ride the mule, all he needed to do was to take a mouthful of water and squirt it over the mule. When a certain priest was asked by Emperor Hsüan Tsung who Chang Kuo Lao was, the priest answered, "I know who he is, but I do not dare to say because if I did I'll die immediately. If you promise to save my life, I will tell you." Upon the Emperor giving him the promise, the priest said,

"Chang Kuo Lao is the reincarnation of a white bat." No sooner had he said this than all the seven apertures of his head started bleeding and he fell dead immediately. The Emperor Hsüan Tsung went with his cap doffed and his feet bared to beg the forgiveness of Chang Kuo Lao, who said, "This young fellow is too talkative and must be punished, otherwise all heavenly secrets will be divulged." However, Chang Kuo Lao squirted water over the priest's face, immediately reviving him.



Chang Kuo Lao riding a mule



已逢志士傳神藥
又喜同流動笑顏

Ts'ao Kuo Chiu

Ts'ao Kuo Chiu lived during the Yuan Dynasty and was the younger brother of a queen. He was good looking and was much liked by the emperor who once asked him where he was going when he came to say goodbye. Ts'ao replied, "My heart goes in all ten directions and I roam according to its wish at the moment." So the emperor gave him a gold medal engraved with the words: "The Emperor wishes that his brother-in-law be treated wherever he goes as if accompanied by His Majesty." Once, during Ts'ao's travels, he had to cross the Yellow River, and not having any money when a toll was demanded of him, he took out the gold medal and showed it to the ferryman. When others saw the inscription on the gold coin, they shouted, "Long live the Emperor." Someone among the crowd, a poorly dressed priest, how-



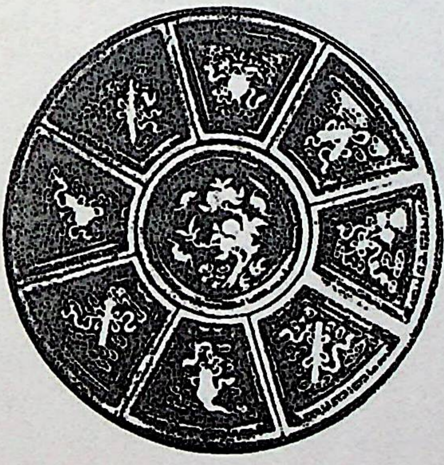
Taoist Chang Kuo Lao before Emperor Hsüan Tsung of T'ang Dynasty



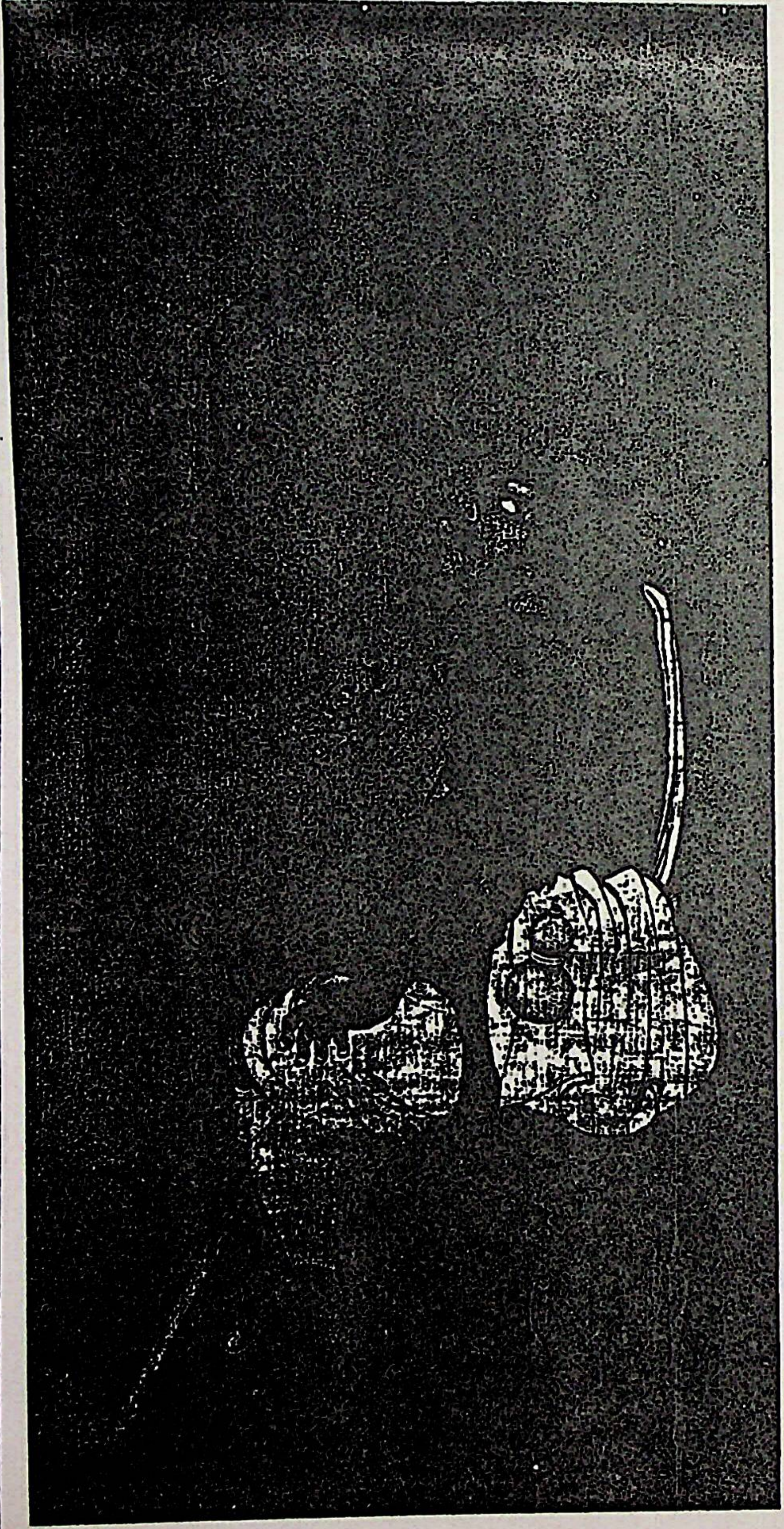


ever, addressed him in a loud voice, "Since you are cultivating Tao, why should you use the name of dignitaries to influence people?" Upon hearing this, Ts'ao bowed and said, "How dare I depend on others' influence." "Would you mind throwing the badge in the water?" asked the priest. That was done without a thought, to the great amazement of the crowd. The priest took Ts'ao aside and said to him, "Do you know Lü Tung Pin?. . . I am he, and I have come to help you become an Immortal."

Another anecdote says that he met the two Immortals Chung-li Ch'üan and Lü Tung Pin, who questioned him what it was he was cultivating. He replied, "I am cultivating Tao." They asked, "Where is Tao?" Ts'ao pointed up to heaven. "Where is heaven?" they said. T'sao pointed to his heart. The two Immortals remarked, laughing, "Your heart is one with heaven, and heaven is one with Tao. You have indeed understood the Way."



Sweet-dishes with symbolic designs depicting the personal accouterments of the Eight Immortals. Clockwise: flower-basket, castanets, lotus with stalk or magic fungus, flute, fan, "fish-drum", bottle-gourd, sword.



Li T'ieh-kuai



PART TWO

The Deliverance Of Iron-crutch Li Yueh By Lü Tung Pin

Adapted from a music-play (Tsa-chü) of the Yüan Dynasty (1260-1341) by Yüeh Po-Ch'uan

(Abridged)



Li T'ieh-kuai
by Ch'i Pai-Shih

人須人度超塵世
龍要龍交出汙泥

ACT I

MRS. YÜEH. (*sings*)

Flowers will blossom again,
But Youth does not return.
Say not gold is valuable:
Peace is the most precious gift.

My maiden name is Li and I am the wife of Yüeh Shou who is an administrative officer here in Cheng Chou. We have a son called Fu T'ung. He is attending school and my husband is not yet home. I am preparing dinner.

(*Withdraws*)

LÜ TUNG PIN. (coming in from outside). I beseech you all worldly people to leave home and follow me. I will teach you how to under-

stand the Way and become immortal.

(*Looking around*)

It seems nobody is here. I am no ordinary person but Lü Tung Pin, one of the Eight Immortals. Here in Cheng Chou a potential immortal lives. His name is Yüeh Shou. He has presently lost his Way, entrapped in worldly goods and pleasures.

(*Pretends to weep*)

I grieve for Yüeh Shou. How pitiable he is.

(*Pretends to laugh, as a child approaches*)

CHILD. I am Fu T'ung, the son of Yüeh Shou, coming home from school. Here is a priest. Let me greet him. (*Bows*)

LÜ TUNG PIN. You fatherless bastard!

CHILD. Why, I was polite to you and you repay goodwill with foul words. I'll tell my mother. (Seeing Mrs. Yüeh) Mother, someone outside here called me a fatherless bastard!

MRS. YÜEH. Where is he? Let me look at him.

(*Sees* Lü)

You are awfully rude. Why did you laugh and cry and then call my son a fatherless bastard?

LÜ TUNG PIN. You are a widow, with a fatherless bastard as son.

MRS. YÜEH. Now you have turned to ridicule me. I am a lady and am not going to quarrel with you. Wait till my husband comes back — and don't you run away!

(*In another part of the town.* Yüeh Shou *comes in, accompanied by his aide* Chang Ch'ien)

YÜEH SHOU. My name is Yüeh Shou, a native of Cheng Chou, and an administrative officer. A month ago, I received an official communication which says that the Emperor has sent an Imperial Inspector called Han Wei Kung to visit Cheng Chou, and scrutinize its affairs. There is much corruption and injustice around and about. This Inspector has extensive powers, including that of "executing an offender before reporting to the Emperor". I hear quite a few officials have got wind of his coming and bolted. My friend, why do you think I am still here?

CHANG CH'IEN. Yes, why don't you run away too?

YÜEH SHOU. Well, you should know. My conscience is clear and I have nothing to hide. That is why I am not running away. Now since our Imperial Inspector has not yet arrived, let us go home and have supper and then go and meet him.

(*Walking away*)

CHANG CH'IEN. Allow me to ask, since we are not discussing anything in particular, why you gave no verdict on the prisoners the other day?

YÜEH SHOU. Yes, that is a good question. I suspect someone has been bribed so that the case has been misrepresented. If I gave a verdict, the innocent would be victimized and the culprits freed. Alas, how few government officials are above blame or blemish!

(*Sings*)

Poor devils,
So badly paid –
So despised –
Without the strength or skill
To use the plough and hoe,
But well empowered
To use the instruments of torture.
They are past masters of the writing brush
Which can turn truth into falsehood
A truly lethal weapon!

LÜ TUNG PIN (*laughing*). Yüeh Shou, you are going to die this year, this month, this day, this hour.

CHANG CH'IEN (*seeing* Lü). There is a mad fellow at the door.

YÜEH SHOU (*discovers* Lü). What an insolent fellow. Let me talk to him.

(*Addressing* Lü)

Hey, you there, why are you crying and laughing at my door?

LÜ TUNG PIN. Yüeh Shou, you are a headless demon. You are going to die.

YÜEH SHOU. What is the meaning of all this? I am not in a good mood, so you'd better be careful. I have been trying to meet the Imperial Inspector without success, and here you are calling me a headless demon.

MRS. YÜEH. You haven't heard him yet. He called me a widow and your son a fatherless bastard.

YÜEH SHOU. Wife, you go in. Let me ask him who has provoked him into all these incivilities.

LÜ TUNG PIN. Yüeh Shou, you are a headless demon and when you die, your son will be a fatherless bastard.

YÜEH SHOU. What an insolent rascal.

(*Sings*)

You take advantage of the weak and young,
Begging for food and wine
Laughing and weeping
Without any cause or reason.

LÜ TUNG PIN. I am a religious person. How can you touch me.

YÜEH SHOU. Easy, I don't need a warrant. All I need is my two fingers to pick up pen and paper. I can put you in prison.

LÜ TUNG PIN. Yüeh Shou, do you dare?

YÜEH SHOU. Yes, I can strip you of your religious robe and give you as good a flogging as I would an ass.

LÜ TUNG PIN. Yüeh Shou, you are a headless demon.

YÜEH SHOU. Why am I a headless demon?

LÜ TUNG PIN. Han Wei Kung is here and corrupt officials like you will not be able to escape from the net of justice.

YÜEH SHOU. Nonsense. He will certainly not make things difficult for hardworking people like me.

LÜ TUNG PIN. Don't pretend you are not afraid.

YÜEH SHOU. Chang Ch'ien, go and tie the rascal up. I'll question him again after dinner.

CHANG CH'IEN (to Lü). You rascal, how dare you insult my master.

(*Tying* Lü *to the door. He walks off. Meanwhile* Imperial Inspector Han Wei Kung *comes in and unties* Lü. Lü *goes.*)

CHANG CH'IEN. Master, monks and priests often behave like the rascal outside. He is no exception. Why not just let him go?

YÜEH SHOU. See if he has sobered up. Do what you like with him.

(Chang Ch'ien, *surprised at the disappearance of* Lü, *speaks to* Han Wei Kung *who is standing by.*)

Where is the rascal? He was here a moment ago. Did you let him loose?

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. I did. I took pity on him. He looks destitute.

CHANG CH'IEN. What audacity! What has come over you, daring to go against the will of my master. Let me go and report to him.

(*Stands before* Yüeh Shou)

An old man outside says he has set the rascal free, a village old man. This is intolerable.

YÜEH SHOU. Set up the interrogation screen and let me question him.

(Han Wei Kung *stands between screen and* Yüeh Shou)

Where is the village old man?

CHANG CH'IEN. Here he is.

YÜEH SHOU. Ask him whether he lives in the country or in the city.

CHANG CH'IEN (*to* Han). My master asks whether you live in the country or in the city.

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. I have a farm house in the country and a town house in the city.

CHANG CH'IEN (*aside*). This fellow must be a tax dodger. When he is wanted in the city, he is in the country, when he is wanted in the country he is in the city. I must tell my master.

(*to* Yüeh Shou)

Master, the old man says he has a farm house in the country and a town house in the city.

YÜEH SHOU. What an arrogant fellow. Don't let him run away. I must yet teach him a lesson. I shall make things difficult for him. I'll tell you how. If he is a businessman I shall try to find fault with his balances or measures so that he will feel harassed all the time.

CHANG CH'IEN. But if he does not do business but sits at home, what can you do to him?

YÜEH SHOU. Of course I can do something to him. I can drag him out of his house and give him a good thrashing, for not white-washing his house on time.

CHANG CH'IEN. But if he chooses not to live in the city but in the country, what can you do then?

YÜEH SHOU. If he hides in the country, I shall order the village bailiff to summon him here for some reason or other. If he quickly responds, I'll drop the matter. If he procrastinates, I shall punish him for contempt and have him flogged. If he shows further disrespect, I can get a burglar to point at him and he can be convicted of collusion or possession of stolen goods. He can be flogged till his back breaks.

CHANG CH'IEN. Master, to be very frank with you, I have been working very hard these last few days. Won't you do me a favour by granting me permission to release him so that I can extort some money from him for my family's support?

YÜEH SHOU. Very well, do that. I shall be quite busy myself going to meet our Imperial Inspector.

CHANG CH'IEN (*to* Imperial Inspector). You are lucky, old man. I have spent a lot of time trying to argue in your behalf. I suppose you are not a native here. Are you a bowl or a cup?

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. What is the difference between a bowl and a cup?

CHANG CH'IEN. I say, stupid, a bowl has no ear but a cup has one. Obviously you have not heard about my master. He is a much-dreaded man, Yüeh Shou is. Who is not afraid of him whose nickname is Golden-winged Falcon?

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. Why Golden-winged Falcon?

CHANG CH'IEN. Because he is so voracious that he can swallow the whole world. Do you realise who I am?

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. Who are you?

CHANG CH'IEN. I am Small Falcon.

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. Why Small Falcon?

CHANG CH'IEN. Well, it is like this. My master is so powerful that he can put anyone in prison at will – for a year, for two years. . . or he can get rid of him altogether. He is the great falcon; but he also takes my advice. Just now he was going to kill you but I succeeded in persuading him to desist.

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. Thank you very much. Good bye.

CHANG CH'IEN (*holding the* Imperial Inspector *by the sleeve*). You must not go like this. Have you not heard that he who is in charge of a hill gets firewood and he who is in charge of a river gets water?

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. I have never heard that said.

CHANG CH'IEN. You are indeed a country bumpkin. I have saved your life and you don't even know that you should give me something for it.

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. Oh, well, I do have some money with me. Why don't you put your hand into my waist-purse and take some.

CHANG CH'IEN (*dipping into the purse and taking something out*). What, a gold badge! (*shows sign of fear*)

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. Cheng Chou is making

ready for the reception of some official. Who is he?

CHANG CH'IEN. Han Wei Kung.

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. Look up and know that I am he.

CHANG CH'IEN. I'll be damned.

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. You just said Yüeh Shou is called the Golden-Winged Falcon.

CHANG CH'IEN. He is now an old black crow.

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. You said you were the Small Falcon.

CHANG CH'IEN. I am a little sparrow.

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. Know that I am here to root out corruption. That is why I came incognito. Now go back and tell your master to come and see me tomorrow morning.

(*Exeunt*)

YÜEH SHOU. This fellow Chang Ch'ien, where has he been all this time? (*Sees* Chang *approaching*) What have you been doing all this time? Seen a ghost?

CHANG CH'IEN. Seeing you is like seeing a ghost.

YÜEH SHOU. Since when has his fellow become so insolent. Tell me, has the old country man gone?

CHANG CH'IEN. I am scared to death, Master. Whom do you say you are going to meet?

YÜEH SHOU. The Imperial Inspector, of course.

CHANG CH'IEN. That old man is the Imperial Inspector. I demanded money from him and he let me look at his gold badge. I am scared to death.

YÜEH SHOU. What did you say to him?

CHANG CH'IEN. I said you were the Golden-winged Falcon and I was the Small Falcon.

YÜEH SHOU. By God, you have betrayed me. And what did he say to you?

CHANG CH'IEN. He told me that he wants to see you at his office.

YÜEH SHOU. All is finished. Chang Ch'ien, get my horse.

(*falls.* Mrs. Yüeh *comes in and helps* Yüeh Shou *get up*)

CHANG CH'IEN. Master, are you all right? Are you all right?

YÜEH SHOU. Wife, you take Fu Tung to see the Imperial Inspector and tell him I am sorry for all I have done. I shall mend my ways. Now take me to my bedroom.

ACT II

At the Office of the Imperial Inspector

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. My name is Han Chi. I passed the Imperial Examination at an early age. I am well-known for being an incorruptible government servant. I am here on imperial instructions to investigate the affairs of Cheng Chou, where I am told a certain Yüeh Shou is creating a lot of hardship for the people. Yesterday I caught his aide red-handed, extorting money, and I understand fear has driven Yüeh Shou to distraction. He is ill and in bed. But what I have seen from the dossiers and things here points to the fact that he is an able

administrator.

(*to attendants*) Go and call Sun Fu here.

SUN FU. People say, "avoid government offices".
I say it is a good place to learn moral conduct.
If one does not distort the facts nor warp the truth,
One will be well on his way to Heaven.

I am Sun Fu and a junior assistant here. (*addressing the Imperial Inspector*) I am here, Sir, at your command.

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. I want you to go and see Yüeh Shou and give him these silver ingots. He needs medical attention and the money may come in handy. Tell him that I want him to carry on his former duties when he gets well.

(*Exeunt* Imperial Inspector *and* Sun Fu)

(Yüeh Shou *enters, leaning on the arms of* Mrs. Yüeh *and* Chang Ch'ien)

YÜEH SHOU. Wife, I am going to die. Take good care of our son. I am going to faint now. (*faints*)

MRS. YÜEH. I pray God he will be all right. Chang Ch'ien, help me to put these clothes on him (*putting clothes on* Yüeh Shou).

YÜEH SHOU (*coming to*). What is all this fuss? I feel so warm. Take the clothes off.

MRS. YÜEH. But these are the clothes you like best. You have been a hardworking man all your life. What is the use of keeping things and not using them?

YÜEH SHOU. Please take them off and keep

them.

MRS. YÜEH. What you bought you should wear.

YÜEH SHOU. But who would see them anyway when I am buried deep in the ground? Listen to me. When I am dead, you may be destitute and you may need money then. At least you will have these clothes to pawn.

(*Enters* Sun Fu; *he sees* Chang Ch'ien)

SUN FU. How is Yüeh Shou this morning? I am here on instruction from the Imperial Inspector to give him some money.

CHANG CH'IEN. Please don't mention the name Imperial Inspector or my master will have another fit.

YÜEH SHOU. Who is outside?

CHANG CH'IEN. Sun Fu is here.

YÜEH SHOU (*seeing* Sun Fu). Please sit down. What business brings you here?

SUN FU. The Imperial Inspector orders me to give you this money and to convey this message: he wants you to resume your former duties as soon as you are well enough to work.

YÜEH SHOU. But I am a very sick man, with one foot in the grave. How can I ever serve the country again? But hear this. You have been my colleague for fifteen years and I want you to take care of my wife and son when I am dead. Wife, go and boil some congee for me.

MRS. YÜEH (*aside*). He wants me to go so that he can confide something to Sun Fu. (*pretends to go out, but listens at the door*)

YÜEH SHOU. Fu Tung, come and kneel down before uncle Sun Fu. Friends in need are rare

and I want you to go to uncle Sun Fu when in difficulty. (*to* Sun Fu) As for my wife, I want you to give her advice whenever she needs it. She is bashful and may be taken advantage of by some unscrupulous men.

(Mrs. Yüeh *emerges from her hiding place*)

MRS. YÜEH. My husband, how can you talk like that. You know I shall remain a widow all my life when you are dead. I shall not set foot outside the house; I promise I shall not give men any chance to see me.

YÜEH SHOU. But aren't you going to go with my hearse to the cemetery? Could you help that after twenty years of marriage? How can you avoid being seen by some rake or profligate? How can your youth pass unnoticed? Then those who have designs on you will proffer you fine jewellery and your heart will soon waver. Can I blame you?

(*to son* Fu Tung) Son, while I still can carry on, I want you to remember one thing when you grow up. Do not be a government officer. Be a farmer rather. Learn to plough and to produce your own food. This is a better way to make a living.

(*to* Mrs. Yüeh) And now I have a few last words. I hope you will not remarry but bring up our son to be a good upright person. Then I shall rest in peace.

SUN FU. You must be tired now. Don't worry about your family. I shall be responsible for their safety and sustenance.

YÜEH SHOU. Thank you for all that, Sun Fu.

(*to* Mrs. Yüeh) And now my wife, when I am dead I beseech you to give proper attention to my burial. Ugh! What agony not to be able to move anymore, not able to see my old friends, not able to be with my wife and son. The time of re-union of us three is far away. (*dies*)

SUN FU. It is unbelievable that Yüeh Shou should die so suddenly. I must now go and report to the Imperial Inspector.

(*Exeunt*; Mrs. Yüeh *weeping*)

(*Enter* Yama, King of the Netherworld accompanied by two demons called Ox-head and Horse-face respectively)

YAMA. (*sings*)

People who commit sins will suffer unbearable pain.
Forests of daggers and spears inflict boundless anguish.
So be early to mend your ways
And do nought but good.

I am Yama, King of the Netherworld. Here there are eighteen strata of hell and I am in charge of that area in which human beings who have done wrong in the world are punished. Today I have a case of someone called Yüeh Shou of Cheng Chou, whose evil doings in the world have thrown him into my net. (*to the demons*) Bring Yüeh Shou in.

(*Enters* Yüeh Shou *facing* Yama)

Yüeh Shou, do you know your offence?

YÜEH SHOU. No, my Lord. I don't know what wrong I have done.

YAMA. You have committed many offences

against your conscience in the world and don't you deny it. (*to* Oxhead *and* Horse-face) Boil some oil in the cauldron, put a coin there and then make Yüeh Shou go and get it.

OX-HEAD. Yes, my lord.

YÜEH SHOU. All is finished now. I can see all the wrongs I did and now I must suffer the fire of hell. Even now I can see the oil boiling and Ox-head stirring it with his fork.

(*Enters* Lü Tung Pin, *rushing towards* Yüeh Shou *and stops in front of him*)

LÜ TUNG PIN. Yüeh Shou, do you see the light now? Have you understood the Truth? Do you know life and death?

YÜEH SHOU. Master, come and save your pupil.

LÜ TUNG PIN.
The boiling oil may be hot
But you can avoid it;
The sea of suffering may be unbounded
But the shore is where you turn round.

Yüeh Shou, do you understand that?

YÜEH SHOU. You pupil understands now.

LÜ TUNG PIN. Would you come with me?

YÜEH SHOU. I will.

LÜ TUNG PIN. Stop, demon. Wait till I speak to your master.

(Lü Tung Pin *sees* Yama)

YAMA. Excuse me for not knowing that you were here. I should have gone to welcome you.

LÜ TUNG PIN. Do tell me what crime Yüeh Shou has committed to be punished by boiling in a cauldron of oil.

YAMA. He has acted against his conscience and has offended Your Holiness.

LÜ TUNG PIN. The God in Heaven is merciful. I should appreciate it if you would free him from this and let him come with me as my pupil to return to the world.

YAMA. Let me see (*looking outside*).
It is a pity Yüeh Shou's wife has cremated his body and his spirit cannot find its own home.

LÜ TUNG PIN. That's bad. Please see if there is another way.

YAMA. Let me look again (*looking outside*).
Oh, there is a chance. There is over there in Cheng Chou the son of Li Tu dead for three days. His body is still warm. He'll do. If you like, Yüeh Shou can use that corpse for his reincarnation. How does that suit you?

LÜ TUNG PIN. Good, good. Yüeh Shou, you are lucky. You can inhabit the corpse of Li Tu, Jr.. Now, when you go back to the world, don't you indulge in wine and women, don't be greedy about money, don't engage in worldly disputes. You will use the name Li for your surname and your old surname for your first name and you can use the Taoist appellation Iron-Crutch. Now leave this Netherworld.

(Exit Yüeh Shou)

LÜ TUNG PIN. Let Yüeh Shou go back to the world, live through his foibles till he sees his way and then I'll go and guide him so that he will become one of us.

YAMA. . . . I see life and death displayed in front of me;

How many years can one live in
honour or disgrace.
This morning Yüeh Shou has gone
to find his spirit a home;
Some day he will become one of
the Immortals.

ACT III

(*Enters* Li Tu)

LI TU. I am Li Tu, a butcher. My son Li Tu, Jr. died three days ago, but strangely his body is still warm and now they are carrying him out here for me to look at.

(Li Tu, Jr. *being carried by several people*)

Why, you have come back to life.

(Yüeh Shou's *spirit has now entered the body of* Li Tu, Jr. *He will now be called* Iron-Crutch Li)

IRON-CRUTCH LI. My wife, Chang Ch'ien and Fu T'ung, where are you all?

LI TU. Thank Heaven and Earth, my son has returned to life.

IRON-CRUTCH LI. What are you doing here in my room? If you have any business, go to my office, you understand?

LI TU. I am your father. This is your wife and this is your son. How is it you don't recognise them now?

IRON-CRUTCH LI (*sing*).

Who is he?
Who are they?

Let me think –
No, no,
I don't know any of them.

MRS. LI. Li Tu Junior, don't you remember I am your wife?

IRON-CRUTCH LI. The sky is azure as before
And the sun as bright
But no son or wife here.
It is only three days since
My son cried his eyes out.
I am here but where are they?
When can all three of us re-unite?

(*to* Li Tu) Chang Ch'ien, help me to get up.

LI TU. Why do you call me that? I am your father.

MRS. LI. And I am your wife, why don't you recognise me?

IRON-CRUTCH LI. Don't get excited now. Let me think. Let me think again.

(*aside*)

My spirit is Yüeh Shou's and my body is Li Tu Junior's. I suppose I am in Li Tu's home.

(*to all*)

Part of my spirit is still in Ch'eng Huang Temple, I am not complete. Let me go and fetch the other part.

MRS. LI. Father, don't let him go.

IRON-CRUTCH LI. My spirit is scattered by human beings. I must go and fetch the missing part.

(*making an effort to get up but falling*)

Ugh! It's killing me!

LI TU. Son, your foot. It's crippled.

IRON-CRUTCH LI. Oh Master, why give me a deformed body? Can't you trust me?

LI TU. Let me get your crutch.

IRON-CRUTCH LI. Please, quick.

(*takes crutch and makes for door*)

MRS. LI. Don't go till tomorrow – till you have rested.

IRON-CRUTCH LI. Leave me alone. I must go. Oh what terrible retribution I am paying for my wrongs. How true it is:

One seven-inch bamboo-brush
Of fine rabbit hair,
In the hands of a magistrate
Is more dangerous than a dagger.

Oh yes, I did take full advantage of my pen. Yes, I did feed my family well. And now look at me, limping, one foot higher than the other. A deformed mind engenders a deformed body.

(*looking back at* Mrs. Li *who is following him*)

Don't come, don't come. I am going to the Temple to repair my soul.

(*stops and looks at his own shadow*)

What? Whose shadow is this (*feeling his grisly hair and beard*)? By God, how I have changed!

(*sings*)

Hair dishevelled, beard uncombed,
Leaning on an iron-crutch,
A sickly body
An ugly face

Clothes all in rags
Stinking of putrifaction –
How could my son and wife
Disengage my spirit from my body!

ACT IV

(*Enters* Mrs. Yüeh)

MRS. YÜEH. The Imperial Inspector thinks my husband was an able administrator, and when he died of fear, the Inspector saw fit to honour him by renovating our house. A Chaste-widow arch was erected and I am expected to remain a widow to perpetuate his memory. Today we are arranging a prayer service for my husband and I have sent Chang Ch'ien and Sun Fu to invite some priests here. I am going to the door to see if they are coming back.

(*Enters* Iron-Crutch Li)

IRON-CRUTCH LI. How strange! I can't remember where my old home is.

(*Asks stranger*)

Can you tell me where Yüeh Shou's house is?

STRANGER. Just over there. You see the newly whitewashed walls. He lived there but he died some days ago. The Imperial Inspector had his house renovated in his honour.

IRON-CRUTCH LI. I wonder what merit Yüeh Shou had to deserve all this. If my son and wife knew I am here, how surprised would they be.

(*calls at door*)

Please open the door.

(Mrs. Yüeh *opens door*)

MRS. YÜEH. Oh, how revolting! A beggar. Go away. (*pushing* Iron-Crutch Li *out*)

IRON-CRUTCH LI (*sings*).

She opens the door
She pushes me out
And clean ignores me.
If you ignore me
Well and good
But why push and punch
And be so very rude.

MRS. YÜEH (*aside*). This fellow talks strangely. (*to* Iron-Crutch Li)
Who are you anyway?

IRON-CRUTCH LI. I am your husband.

MRS. YÜEH. What nonsense! You just want to take advantage of me. Be careful or I'll shout for help.

IRON-CRUTCH LI. Listen to me and you will believe what I say. You remember the day when I came home for dinner after failing to meet the Imperial Inspector and I tied up an old beggar who swore at us saying you were a widow and my son was a fatherless bastard and so on. You remember the farmer who released the old beggar was in fact the Imperial Inspector; and learning of this I was out of my mind and I died the next day. I was on the point of being boiled in oil when the Immortal Lü Tung Pin came to my rescue. He was going to put my spirit back to my dead body when it was discovered you had already cremated it. So, in desperation, my spirit took the first body that offered itself. Oh, what disaster. And here I

am, pushed out by my own wife.

MRS. YÜEH. So it is your spirit in someone else's body. In that case, come in. But how come you in this state.

IRON-CRUTCH LI. It is all because I was wicked. I deserve it.

(*Enter* Chang Ch'ien and Sun Fu)

CHANG CH'IEN & SUN FU (*see* Iron-Crutch Li). What is all this? A beggar sitting there like the master of the house. Let me get a rod and bash him.

IRON-CRUTCH LI. You two never change. Same old impudent fellows. Why don't you greet your superior.

MRS. YÜEH. He is not a beggar, but Yüeh Shou.

CHANG CH'IEN. But how unlike what he was. How he has changed! How did you come back to life?

IRON-CRUTCH LI. I have used the corpse of Li Tu Junior for my spirit's home.

(*Enter* Li Tu *and* Mrs. Li *and* son)

LI TU. I have been following you, my son, what are you doing here? Let's go home.

IRON-CRUTCH LI. This is my house.

MRS. YÜEH. And he is my husband.

MRS. LI. No, he is mine.

(*General tumult and confusion.* Chang Ch'ien *takes crutch from* Iron-Crutch Li *and starts to strike* Li Tu. Iron-Crutch Li *intercepts.*)

LI TU. I'll go to the Court to settle this.

(*Enters* Imperial Inspector)

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. What is all the commotion? Who wants to make a complaint?

LI TU. Injustice! Injustice!

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. Who wants injustice redressed? Come over here. Yes old man, what's your complaint?

LI TU. Have pity on me, Imperial Inspector. My son was dead three days. He came back to life this morning. But he is not recognising me as father.

MRS. YÜEH. Your honour, this is my husband.

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. (*to* Iron-Crutch Li). Who are you then?

IRON-CRUTCH LI. I am indeed Yüeh Shou whose spirit has returned, inhabiting the body of someone else.

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. This is a serious claim. Speak up now. If you speak the truth you'll be acquitted. Otherwise you will be punished with death.

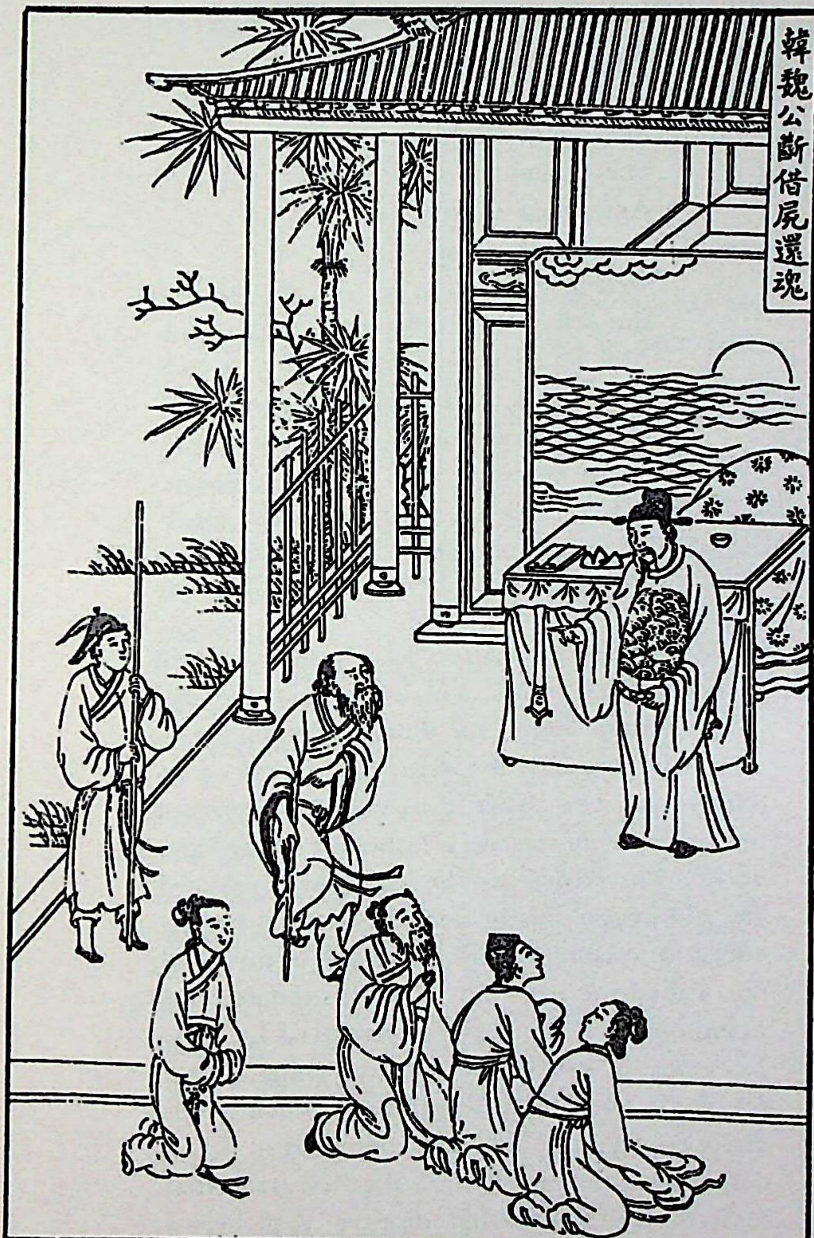
IRON-CRUTCH LI (*sings*).

I died and my spirit went to the Netherworld,
My corpse was cremated.
Though my body has been destroyed, my spirit remains alive. Thanks to Lü Tung Pin I was saved from the boiling oil and here I am adopting a foreign body.

LI TU. My son, come with me.

IRON-CRUTCH LI. No, I am not going with you.

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. Why are you not going with him?



The Imperial Inspector giving judgment

IRON-CRUTCH LI. I don't like butchers. They are too clever with their knives.

LI TU. Your honour, if he refuses to come with me, let me kill him with one stroke of the rod – so no one will want him anymore.

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. Dear me, how am I going to decide on this case?

(*Enters* Lü Tung Pin, *descending from above*)

LÜ TUNG PIN. Imperial Inspector. Be careful how you decide!

IRON-CRUTCH LI. My great master. Let me bow to you.

LÜ TUNG PIN. Yüeh Shou, have you understood the true way?

IRON-CRUTCH LI. Yes, I have. I am ready to go with you to practise Tao.

(*sings*)

Free am I from the jaded shackles
and the golden cangue.
No more liquor
No more women
No more dirty lucre
Away from worldly bondage
and encumbrances.
All I need is a mendicant's bowl
and sack.
In rags I shall roam the streets
wearing straw sandals
carrying an iron crutch
Without worry, without ties.
All this is better than a rich purple
garment with a golden belt.

LÜ TUNG PIN. My pupil, you come with me



Lü Tung Pin delivering Li T'ieh-kuai

today.

IRON-CRUTCH LI. My wife you take good care of Fu Tung.

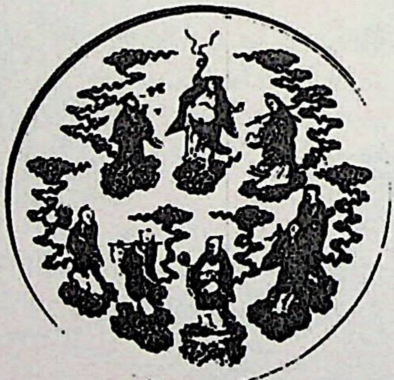
Mrs. Li, you serve Mr. Li well. I am going with my Master.

(*Exeunt* Iron-Crutch Li *and* Lü Tung Pin)

IMPERIAL INSPECTOR. I have passed many winters, but a case like this is pretty rare. To understand the ways of Heaven is not too difficult but our vision often is so narrow . . . So, you here, do not hope your husband will return again. And you here, do not hope your son will call you father. All go home and contemplate what you have seen and mend your errant ways.

(*Enter* Iron-Crutch Li *and* Lü Tung Pin *and other Immortals. Music*)

LÜ TUNG PIN. The immortals are here now. Go with us to Heaven and pay homage to the Jade Emperor.

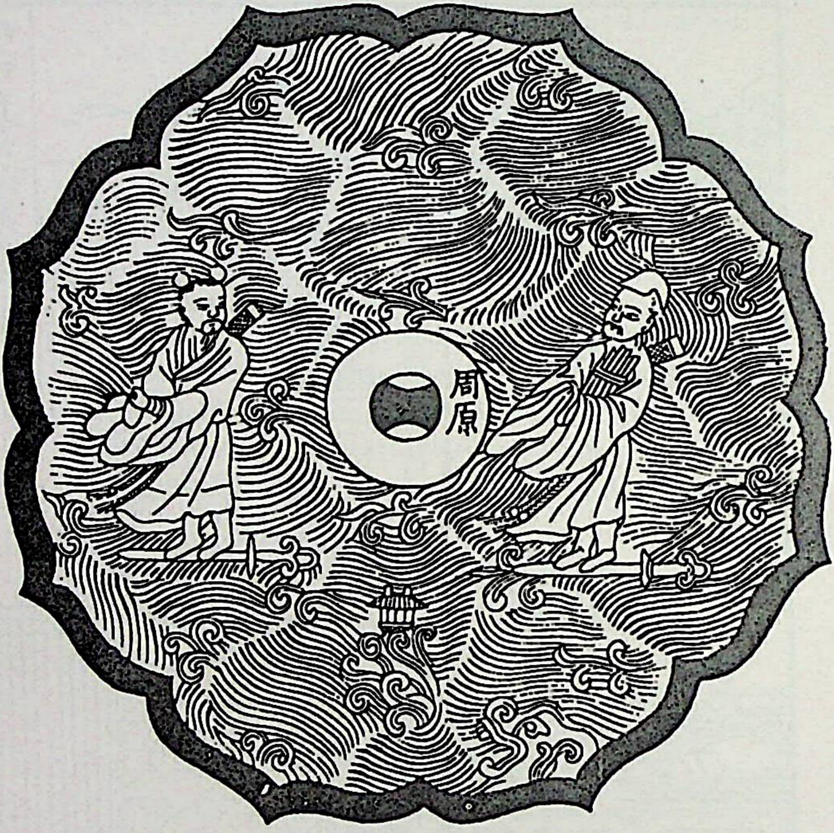


The Eight Immortals on porclain



PART THREE

Lü Tung Pin and His Poems



Back of a bronze mirror (Sung Dynasty) depicting Chung-li Chuan and Lü Tung Pin.

萬頃白雲獨自有
一枝丹桂阿誰無

Lü Tung Pin

Of the eight immortals Lü Tung Pin may be singled out to be the most suitable for a more lengthy treatment in this volume. Not only was he identifiable as a historical personage, but he was also a poet in his own right, his poems having been included in the anthology Chuan-Tang Shih.

Apparently Lü was born in 755 in Yung-Lo Hsien in Shansi province. When he was being delivered at birth, the room was filled with a strange fragrance and the air was vibrant with heavenly music. A white crane swooped down from the sky and disappeared into his mother's bed.

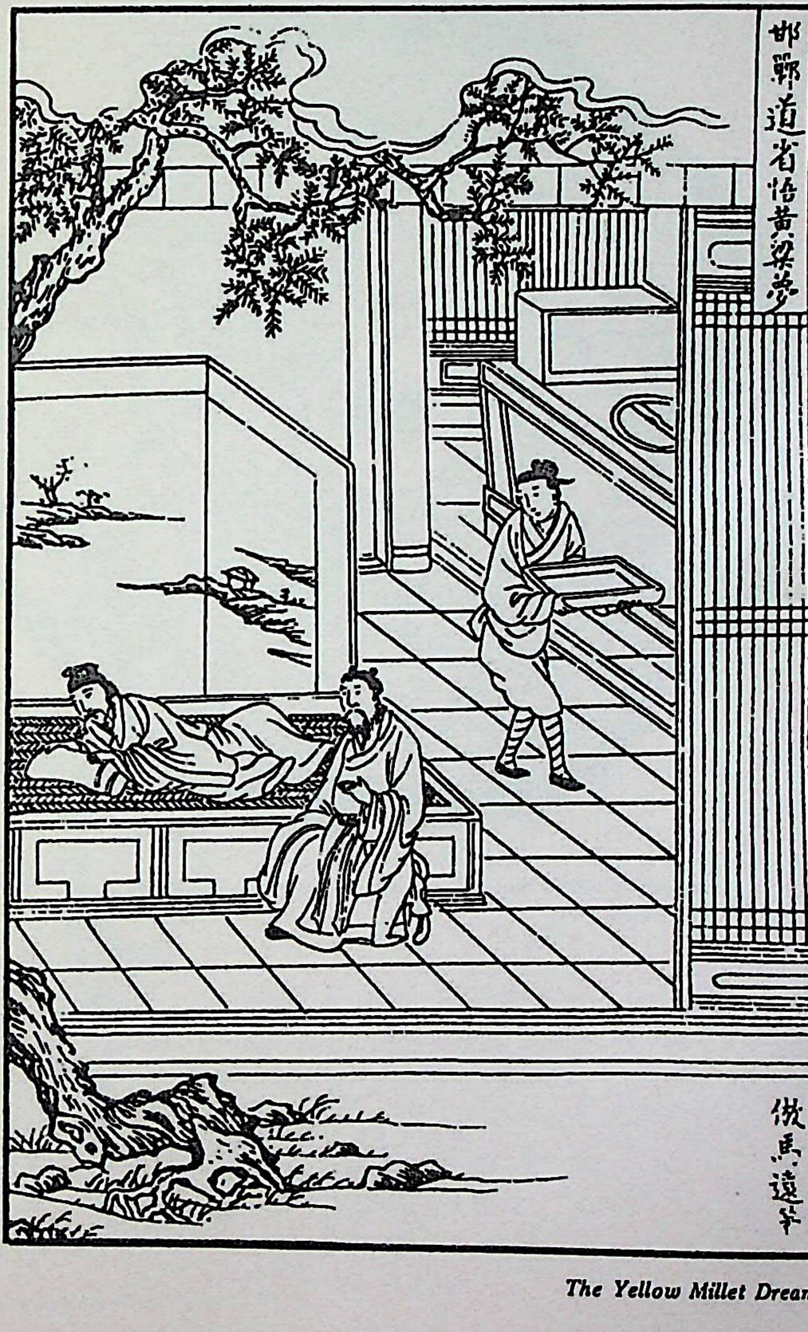
When Lü grew up, he disciplined himself to be a scholar, but was not successful in the Imperial Examination until quite late in life.

One day when he was buying a drink in the market place in Chang An, he met a Taoist adept scribbling a poem on the wall which attracted his attention:

Sitting or lying down, I always have a bottle of
wine around.
I do not aspire to be a mandarin;
I desire no fame in the wide universe;
I am a true man among the world's mortals.
It is not often one meets a true immortal.
Are you then willing to come with me?
He lives in the wilderness adjacent to the sea
Up in a peak in the islands of P'eng Lai.
He does not abstain from pleasures and
merriment

'Cause thinking of the world's turmoil hurts
one's soul.
He counts those who have gained salvation on
his fingers
And finds how very few they really are.

Lu was impressed with the lofty sentiments in the poem and enquire of the writer's name which he learned was Chung-Li Chüan. Lü invited Chung-Li to his lodging and the latter helped him to boil some millet for dinner. Suddenly Lü felt tired and fell asleep. He dreamt he won many laurels in the Court Examination, was tremendously successful in official life, raised many children and grand children and rose to premiership – then suddenly fell into disgrace, severed from his family and stranded in the middle of a thunder storm – when he suddenly awoke.



The Yellow Millet Dream

He found Chung-Li was still by his side and the millet was yet scarcely cooked. Chung-Li smiled and said:

"Before the millet was cooked,
The dream has brought you to the Capital."

Lü was stunned and asked, "How do you know I was dreaming? Do you know what I dreamt?" Chung-Li said, "What you dreamt covered a period of fifty years, the rise, the fall and all the attendant jubilation and heartbreaks – all contracted into a short span and swept away in a moment. What you achieved is not worthy of rejoicing; what you lost need not be lamented. You have now realised the truth about life, which is but a dream."

Lü begged Chung-Li to guide him in his search for truth and to teach him how to save the world's people, but Chung-Li said, "You are not yet ready; wait a few more decades." Lü was disappointed but did not lose heart. He gave up his government appointment and lived the life of a recluse.

Chung-Li then contrived a number of incidents to test Lü's fortitude and determination.

One day coming home Lü found his whole family lying dead. He was apparently unmoved and calmly made preparations to bury them in a lavish manner. But the corpses all came back to life again.

Once Lü was selling something in the market place; the price was agreed on, but the buyer paid him only half the money. Lü did not argue and made no effort to defend his right.



The Eight Immortals by Su Ren-shan

On New Year's day, a beggar made himself a terrible nuisance by being extremely demanding, besides being foul-mouthed. Lü patiently tried to humour him until he went away laughing.

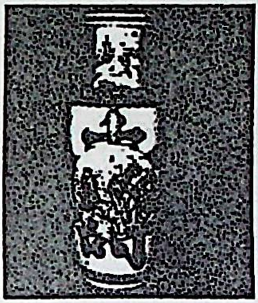
Lü was herding a flock of sheep when a tiger came to harrass them. Lü shielded them by confronting the tiger alone, which left without doing any harm.

One evening Lü was studying alone in a hut up in the hills when a young beautiful girl came in. She said she was going home, but since it was getting dark she begged to be put up for the night, which was granted. She then proceeded to seduce Lü and offered to go to bed with him. However, Lü succeeded in resisting her temptation completely.

All Lü's possessions were burgled and he was left penniless. He did not show any sign of distress or indignation, but instead worked harder in the fields in order to support himself. Upon discovering pieces of gold under his hoe, he covered them up again without taking any.

Alone in his room, Lü suddenly saw many demons rushing towards him, threatening to kill him. Lü was not perturbed. Then a blood-spluttered ghost came wailing and cried, "You killed me. You must give me back my life." Lü said, "If that is the case, I certainly will kill myself." As he was getting ready to kill himself, a thunderclap was heard and all the ghosts and demons disappeared. Chung-Li Ch'üan appeared before him and smiling, said, "It is as difficult to

dispel worldly desires as it is to find the right material for an immortal. My earnestness in searching for the right person is almost greater than people's desire to seek me out. I have tested you thoroughly and I am now confident you will attain immortality." Lü was glad to hear that. However, he said, "But I am not yet ready to leave this world. I must save more humans before I can feel free to go."

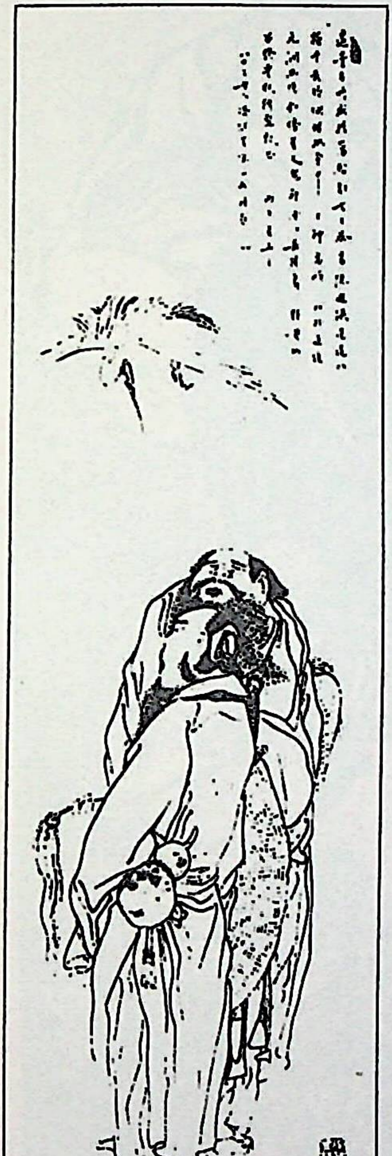


The Eight Immortals on porcelain





The Drunken Immortals by L. S. Shaw



Poems of Lü Tung Pin



I enter at leisure through the palace door,
And stand by the balustrade over the pool.
Of my presence no one is aware,
Save the red-crested crane which welcomes me.

When the moon is high I'll take my cane for
a walk,
When the wind is cold I'll put on some clothes.
My heart is hidden in thick bamboo groves —
I come home alone leading the white clouds.

In the tenth moon plum-blossoms blow
Awaiting the early arrival of the Spring.
If inanimate things can predict nature's Way,
It would be folly for us not to follow the Tao.

To talk about Tao, to talk about the Way –
The whole thing does not make sense.
Heaven, earth, myself and humanity –
Each has its own idea of salvation.

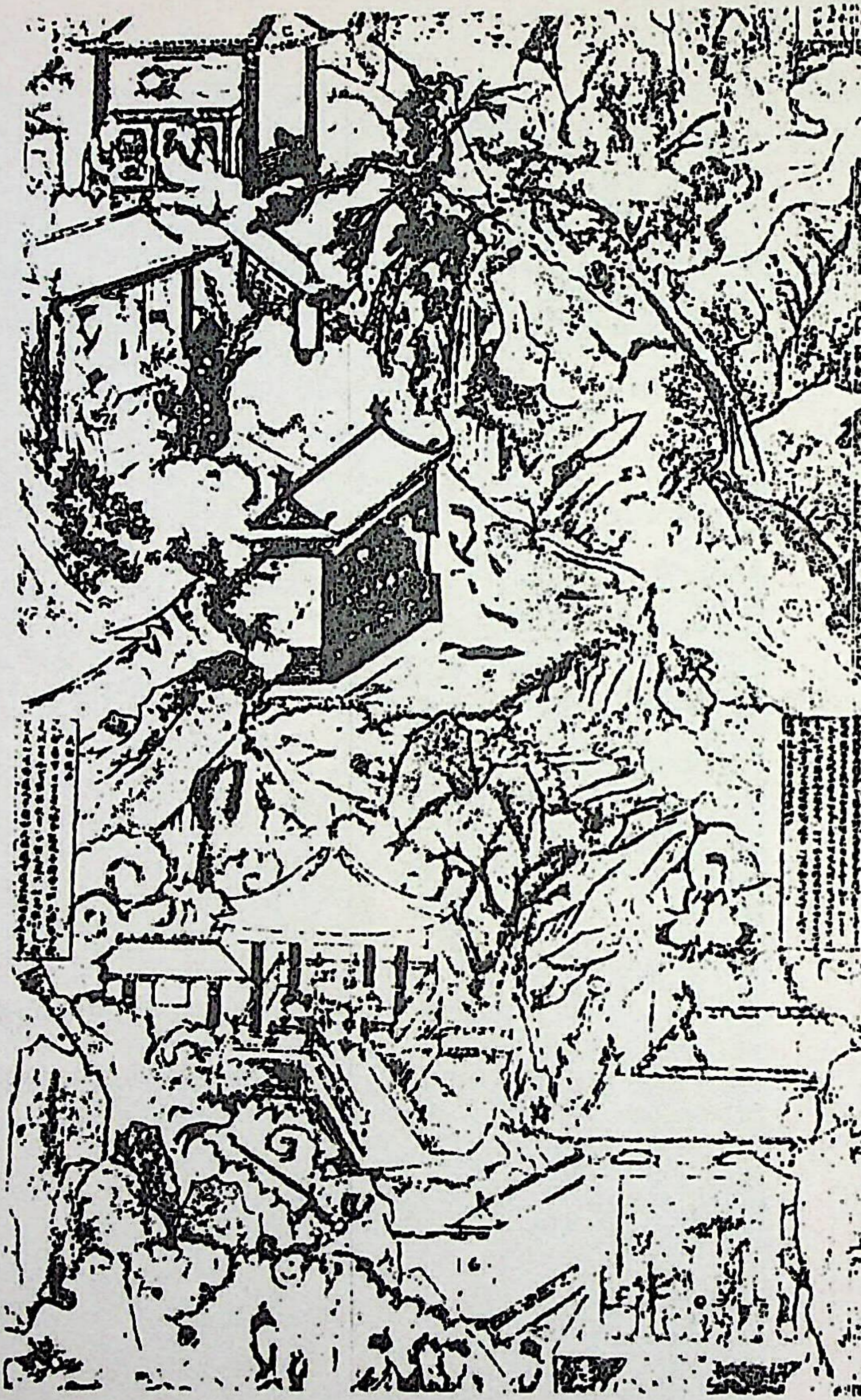
No one saw me paddling on the stream,
Slicing the clear moon on the shimmering mirror.
Wafted by a big wind, I sang
And the seagulls joined the chorus.
Sometimes drunk, I would sleep hugging a heron.
Let me ask of those who crave for gold and fame,
Have they read Chuang Chou's Autumn Waters?

I have pine-breeze for sale.
Have you bought some yet?
For thirty thousand taels of gold,
I shall give you one gourdful.

People may sit till the cushion is worn through,
But never quite know the real Truth:
Let me tell about the ultimate Tao:
It is here, enshrined within us.

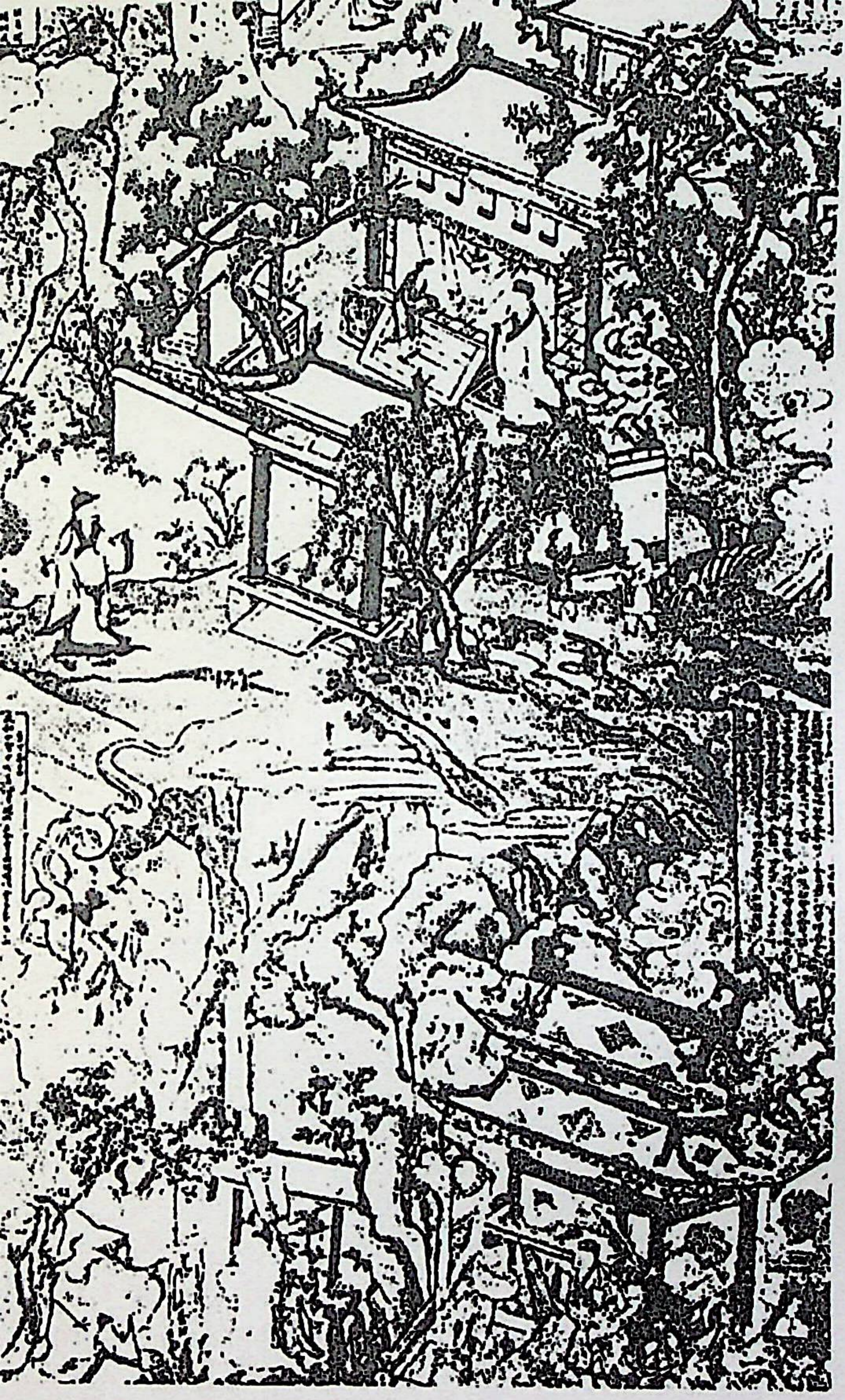
What is Tao?
It is just this.
It cannot be rendered into speech.
If you insist on an explanation,
This means exactly this.

Years ago, I also took the Court Examination.
By chance I met my immortal mentor on the
 road.
A fragrant breeze accompanied his presence,
And cloud-ribbons clasped his heavenly raiment.
Philosophic truths were all that he spoke;
Cautionary songs of celestial beauty he sang.
Admiring not my rank or my wealth,
He patiently taught me to discipline myself.



A mural at Yung Lo Shrine depicting the wanderings of Lü Tung Pin*

* Kublai Khan was anxious to pacify the native Chinese people and thought it would be a good idea to show his concern for their spiritual well-being by erecting a shrine in honour of some of the well-known deities of the Taoist sect. Thus in the year 1272 was



started the building of the shrine called The Great Shun-Yang Longevity Shrine in Yung Lo on the south-west corner of Shansi Province, now generally known as Yung Lo Shrine. As the name implies, the Shrine was dedicated to Shun-Yang, which is the religious appellation of Lü Tung Pin, a native of Yung Lo.

To attain Tao,
It is not necessary
To go to the mountains.
Stay right here.
In the red dust, riding a golden horse –
There is a great Tao practitioner.
Thus it is said
The mountains only provide
Quietude.

Tired by business
Restless
Not knowing about tomorrow;
Loss and gain
Come without cause;
Life is like a lamp in the wind:
Or the morning dew:
All this saddens me.
Nothing lasts:
Like sparks from struck stones,
Like duck-weeds on the pond.

Cease, cease.
Turn back quickly and wipe off
All the pleasures of the past
With one stroke of the brush.
From now on, put on coarse raiment
And live as nature guides you.

Sojourning in Ta-yü mountains –
Who converses with the white crane that comes
flying?
How many times have the mountain people
Seen the winter plum-flowers blossoming?
Spring comes and goes,
Deep in fallen flowers and streams.
People are not aware
Of the many immortals around them.

The elixir of immortality:
There is no need to beg from others.
The eight trigrams,
The nine colours,
Are all on your palms.
The five elements,
The four figures of the diagrams,
Are all within you.
Understanding this
You can communicate with the spirits.

The low sun-beams reclining,
The autumn wind is cold.
Tonight, I have been waiting for my old friend –
Is he coming?
Is he coming or not?
I have been standing beneath the paulownias
Whose shadows, one by one,
Have vanished into the twilight.

Close your eyes to seek for truth
And truth comes naturally.
The pearl of Tao emits ebullience.
Play with it day and night,
Nor throw it away
Lest the God of the Netherworld
Send his underlings after you.

I come alone and sit in solitude.
No one in the world knows me –
All save the spirit of the old tree in the city's brink.
Clearly he knows that an immortal has just passed by.

The rich man on the West worries he hasn't
enough;
The poor man on the East is more than con-
tented.
He makes white wine because he likes friends,
He spent all his gold because he collects books.

I went up the peak to survey the wide expanse.
The moon is there alone after the clouds have
dispersed.
Of the teeming population beneath
How many can be truly called men?

I do not serve princes and do not till the soil.
I sleep till the sun is high holding on to my lute.
I turn some stone into gold and use it,
And will not touch the filthy lucre of the world.

My heart is the clear water in the stony pond.
Right now it is invaded by the peach-blossom shadows.
As soon as I arrive at heaven's palaces
I shall settle down with my seven-stringed lute.

To practise Tao, one must learn to bear extreme poverty.
A few coins should be one's only possessions.
When asked how to practise the ways of the immortals,
I would point at the sun and moon over the horizon.

Having travelled round the globe I find it quite small.
After many blossomings of flowers, one soon gets old.
When Autumn comes I shall fly over the Tung T'ing Lake.
One note of the iron flute – and the sky clears up.

A Chin Shih of the T'ang Dynasty,
An immortal of today,
I tread on the purple mist,
And heavenward I go.

My poetry was held in high esteem in the Capital.
It was a brave thing to renounce worldly fame.
Ten thousand acres of white clouds are mine alone –
Who covets literary laurels at the Court?

Leisurely I wander up the river helped by a fisherman
Drunken I walk up the lotus peak leaning on a novice's arm.
One day I shall certainly meet you again somewhere,
Maybe in a thatched cottage by a stream.

For many springs I have retired to the city of
mysteries.
How many times has the sea turned into land?
In heaven's Jade Court I worship the Supreme
Being;
In the Golden Palace I do homage to Lao Tzu.

I beguile myself by riding my ageless crane:
And then lie down in the clouds on high.
I have learned the secrets of immortality,
Which I would not lightly divulge to anyone.

Pointing at distant peaks I laugh aloud;
Rising before me are the dappled haze and mist.
Often at the bustling market none recognises
me;
Back in the hills the cranes would greet me.

Sometimes with a jade cicada I exorcise demons
And with a golden cauldron I decoct elixir.
If you should come to the grotto in P'eng Lai
You will know my name amongst the immortals.



Ivory figurines of the Eight Immortals

Glossary

Chang Ch'ien	張千
Chang Kuo Lao	張果老
Chang Liang	張良
Ch'ao Chou	潮州
Ch'eng Huang Temple	城隍廟
Chin Shih	進士
Chuang Tzu	莊子
Chung-li Ch'üan	鍾離權
Eight Immortals	八仙
Fu Tung	福童
Han	漢
Han Ch'i	韓琦
Han Chung-li	漢鍾離
Han Hsiang-tzu	韓湘子
Han Wei Kung	韓魏公
Han Yü	韓愈
Ho Hsien-ku	何仙姑
Hsien	仙
Kwangtung	廣東
Lan Ts'ai Ho	藍采和
Lao Tzu	老子
Li Po	李白
Li T'ich Kuai	李鐵拐
Li Tu	李屠
Li Yüch	李岳
Lü Tung Pin	呂洞賓
Lü Yen	呂巖
P'eng Lai	蓬萊
Ta Yü	大庾

T'ai P'ing Kuang Chi	太平廣記
T'ang	唐
Tao	道
Tsa-Chü	雜劇
Ts'ao Kuo Chiu	曹國舅
Tseng Ch'eng	增城
Tung-hua	東華
Tung T'ing Lake	洞庭湖
Yama	閻王
Yellow-millet Dream	黃粱夢
Yüan	元
Yueh Po-chuan	岳伯川
Yüeh Shou	岳壽
Yung-lo	永樂